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SUBJECT: Niger: PM Gamatie Convenes Food Security Commission  
Overview Meeting

Ref: Niamey 0032

1. (U) On January 29, Prime Minister Ali Badjo Gamatie convened the State-Donor Mixed Coordination Commission to discuss Niger's food security situation and the Government of Niger's (GON's) intentions for addressing it. The two-hour meeting offered the GON an opportunity to lay out its views on the issue and make a case for its expectations of others. The meeting was well attended, with participation by representatives of roughly 20 embassies, aid missions, and UN member organizations, as well as of eight key GON ministries. PM Gamatie, who stated President Tandja personally had charged him with this responsibility, made the following points:

-- The Government of Niger regards itself as the pilot of the aircraft on this important matter; no other country can be responsible for what is taking place in Niger;

-- Democracy involves two legs: the liberty of the people and the responsibility of the government to look after their well being. The GON is obligated to respond to the needs of the people, who are its first priority;

-- While there are disagreements about the precise amounts of food available when this past year's harvest, donations, commercial purchases, and existing stocks are taken into consideration, the GON will be transparent regarding the food security situation. The GON was transparent in releasing the results of the December 2009 household food security vulnerability assessment and in laying out its January 2010 Plan to Assist Vulnerable Populations. The latter seeks to reinforce food stocks, enact a "cash for work" program, strengthen grain banks, support pastoral areas, sell cereals at reduced price, bolster agricultural production, provide quality seeds, and assist in nutritional programs. Correspondingly, donors must be transparent regarding their means and extent of assistance, and stick to the program to which they have already agreed;

-- Donors should avoid providing assistance to NGOs, as they necessarily resulted in a loss of 30-40 percent of the funds committed. Furthermore, NGOs tend to exaggerate conditions, and portray the nation's food insecurity in a pejorative context, unnecessarily casting a poor image on Niger and its people. The use of NGOs results in their taking on a "political management role;"

-- While this is a broad, organization meeting, future ones will focus on two levels: strategic and operational aspects of ensuring food security.

2. (SBU) Comment: Gamatie clearly established himself as the tip of the GON's spear on food security issues. His remarks, made for 18 minutes without reference to notes, his gravitas, and his commanding presence in holding forth on this sensitive and urgent subject,

point to an aggressive campaign on the part of the GON to seize leadership on food security. It is clear that he seeks a GON-led effort to address food shortages, with donors/development partners understanding their proper role, and the GON's disdain for NGOs. Future meetings will flesh out details both strategic and operational, and Gamatie may come to realize that most aircraft have a co-pilot as well. End comment.

WHITAKER